

NO FIXITY WITHOUT FAITH

NO. 2305

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 23, 1893
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*"If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."
Isaiah 7:9*

AS I told you in the reading, Isaiah had a very heavy commission from God. He was to go and speak to people who would not hear him and to be to them a messenger rather of death than of life. Though the message itself would be full of life, yet they would refuse it and so bring upon themselves a tenfold death.

As a sort of experiment in his work, he was called upon first to go and speak to king Ahaz, that wicked king. He knew in his own soul that what he had to say would be rejected, but nevertheless, at the command of God, he went to speak to the king. He was told where he would meet him. God knows where to send His faithful servants.

He has arranged every circumstance about the true preacher—what he shall say and where he shall say it—and every congregation is a picked congregation for God's sent servants. He knows who comes and who is away. He knows how to adapt the message with great specialty to the individual case of each person who is within sound of the preacher's voice and He knows how to adapt even the voice itself to the ear of every hearer. We know all this, for we have had abundant evidence of it again and again.

The tidings which Isaiah took to Ahaz were very pleasant ones. He was not to be afraid of the king of Israel and the king of Syria. These men were determined to destroy him and his people, but they were only like smoking firebrands, almost extinct. Their power would soon come to an end and therefore the prophet told the king not to be distressed, but to be quiet and to wait patiently till he saw what God would do.

Then he challenged the faith of Ahaz and warned him that if he did not believe, neither would he be established. Isaiah anticipated what was all too true, that Ahaz would not trust, that he would prefer to look to outward means, send for the king of Assyria and lean upon an arm of flesh rather than put his trust in God. He might have waited, surely, and not have indulged his fears until there was reason for them, but no, he must be all in a fright and a fume notwithstanding that God had said to him, by His servant, Fear not, neither be fainthearted."

Well now, these words of Isaiah to Ahaz furnish us with a warning and an encouragement. God seems to speak out of this blessed Book to you and to me tonight. Certainly, He speaks to me—I hope to you also—"If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

I. Our first head shall be, GOD DESERVES TO BE BELIEVED.

We cannot say this of everybody. Many men deserve to be believed—their character is such that we are bound to trust them. Some men, on the other hand, ought not to be believed—their character is such that we would be foolish to confide in them. But I say tonight of Him who created the heavens and the earth, the God of this Word of God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He claims to be believed and He deserves to be believed.

For, first, *He is God and being God, He cannot lie*. The conception of a lying God may be possible to a heathen, but I trust that to you it is quite out of the question. The very idea of "God" to us means perfect truthfulness, indisputable veracity—God who, from the very necessity of His nature, cannot lie.

He can do anything that is right, but He cannot do a wrong thing. He cannot say an untruthful thing. He cannot, either in word, or deed, or thought, be guilty of falsehood. He is God and He cannot lie.

To impute a lie to God is blasphemy. I will use no softer word. You have brought dishonor upon the sacred name when you have in any way connected the name of JEHOVAH with a lie. “Has he said, and shall he not do it?” But oh, beloved, do not treat the Lord as if He were a liar! Remember that when you doubt His promise—since you know He can fulfill it if He will, for He is omnipotent—when you doubt His promise, you are casting a suspicion upon the veracity of the Eternal God.

Do you mean to do that? Have you never read that word of the beloved and loving disciple, “He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son”? Did you really mean to make God a liar? Were you guilty of such infamy as that? Well, I will say no more upon that point, but He deserves to be believed because He is God. It is essential to every true idea of God to believe that God must be true.

He deserves to be believed because *His Word has always been true*. Any person who is a student of prophecy knows how literally, even in small things, the prophecies of God have been fulfilled. There was a little book which was published some time ago by Mr. Urquhart, of Weston-super-Mare, upon fulfilled prophecy. I gave a copy to a brother, the other day, and on writing to me, he said that he had found it much more interesting than any story or novel he had ever read in his life, and vastly more astounding than any romance, for every jot and tittle, to the dots of the i's, and the crosses of the t's, in the prophecies of God's servants, had been recorded in history. In the ruins of Tyre, and Sidon, and Babylon, and the like, we have in every stone a witness of the faithfulness of God to His Word.

Nor is it merely in history that the Lord has been proved to be true. You and I—I hope I may say that, but I do speak for many here—have proved the faithfulness of God. He has thrown us into different trials. We have had opportunities for testing the promises, which we could not have tested if we had not been tried.

Just as you are unable to see the stars by day, but if you go down a well, you can see them directly at any time of day or night. So, dear friends, God puts us down these deep wells of trial and then we see His starry promises shining brightly. I would rather take the promise of God than the promise of the Bank of England. The Bank of England might fail—a terrible disaster certainly and highly improbable—but the Word of God cannot fail, for the Lord has greater resources than the whole nation has, or all the nations of the earth put together.

The inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers in God's sight. He takes up such isles as we dwell in as very little things. Oh, friends, the Lord may well have all our confidence, for when we confide in Him to our utmost, we have leaned with very little pressure upon the veracity of God! The bull that bore the gnat upon his forehead smiled when the gnat hoped that his weight was not too much for him—and for God to bear us up is as nothing to Him.

We may come to Him with what we call our great wants and He will smilingly say, “A crumb from My table will suffice for a million such as you.” The things that are but trifles with the Most High would be enough for all the inhabitants of the world, if they would come to Him—therefore let us trust Him, as I sometimes say, “Up to the hilt.” Let us go in for glorious trusting of our God.

When a man swims, it is a good thing to have deep water. You do not want then to calculate whether it is a mile deep or twenty miles—if you are swimming, why, you are swimming! When you come to trust in the Infinite God, let Him be infinite in your thoughts as far as the finite can accept infinity. Trust Him without limit or bound, without suspicion or mistrust.

For, further, as He must be true, being God, and as He has been true, being God, so *He has no motive for being untrue*. Why does God ever speak to us at all? Why does the infinite ever stoop out of His boundless glory to make Himself known to creatures that, before Him, are much more insignificant than an ant on the anthill can be to a man? You have never strained yourselves, I am sure, to reveal yourselves to a worm—and yet God has put forth all His sacred ingenuity to manifest Himself to man who, compared with his Maker, is but the insect of a minute.

Why should He speak to us, think you—to deceive us? It seems to me to be the height of absurdity to suppose that if JEHOVAH breaks the eternal silences, it is to mislead a poor, miserable creature like man. Oh, no! The love that makes Him speak cannot be questioned and the truth which He speaks must not be doubted.

If God reveals Himself to men at all, men may, like little children with a father, feel themselves quite sure that they may most safely trust every word of the revelation. Men talk of all the “mistakes of Scripture.” I thank God that I have never met with any. Mistakes of translation there may be, for translators are men, but mistakes of the original Word there never can be, for the God who spoke it is infallible and so is every Word He speaks, and in that confidence we find delightful rest.

There can be no motive for God to give us a Book that is partly true and partly false, about which we are to be the judges, accepting this portion and discarding the other. That would make us worse off and fill us with yet more self-conceit than we should been if we had been left without the Book at all. This can never be the case—therefore let us believe that, in God’s motive for speaking to us, which must be condescending love, there is a guarantee that He speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

I feel almost ashamed to be talking like this about Him who is so surely true, and whom you and I have tried and proved these many years. It seems so idle to have to prove what nobody ought to doubt. For, once more, remember that *the honor of God is involved in His veracity*. If you say that God is not almighty, we may pray God to forgive your mistake. But if you say that He is not truthful, there is a spitefulness, a malice about your assertion which is a grievous wrong to His holy character.

God untrue? Oh, sir, I beseech you, do not think so for a moment, for this is a high crime and misdemeanor against the majesty of the eternal throne! God will sooner cease to be than break His promise or forget His pledged Word. He is very jealous for His own glory.

He calls Himself, in the ten commandments, a jealous God, and so He is. He will never permit the glory of His infinite majesty to be tainted by the suspicion of a falsehood. Therefore, let not any child of His ever doubt Him and as I fear we have done so, let us tremble before Him and repent that we should ever have had the audacity even to tolerate within a mile of our thoughts anything like a suspicion of our God.

His honor is compromised if He breaks His covenant, but this He cannot do, as Paul writes to the Hebrews, “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” The blood of the only-begotten Son of God has sealed the covenant—and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than any part of that covenant shall fall to the ground.

Only this one thing I add. Suppose, even for a moment—a supposition we will not even make—that we could not trust in the truthfulness of God, *what would be left for us to trust to?* When rocks move, what stands firm? If God Himself can change, or be not true—come night, and swallow me up in your blackness. Come chaos, and devour me! Oh, for annihilation, that we might cease to be, if God has ceased to be true!

Then would the harbors be turned to whirlpools. Then would the rocks be turned into clouds. Would there be anything left? Would not everything disappear, like the foam of the sea, if God could be proved to not be true? Thank God, we do not live in such a chaos as that! We know that He is true and with Paul, we cry, “Let God be true, but every man a liar.” Let everything else be swept away like chaff before the wind, but the eternal God and His Word will stand unmoved forever and ever.

That is my first point—God deserves to be believed.

II. But secondly, SOME ARE NOT WILLING TO BELIEVE GOD. That is clear by the fear expressed in the text—“If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.”

“If ye will not believe.” Believing is a matter of the will. A man does not believe without being willing to believe. God’s grace works faith, not upon us, but in us. God works in us to will and to do,

and in the willing, He leads us up to believing. We voluntarily believe, and certainly men voluntarily disbelieve—and some of them, with strong perversity of will, would not believe even though one rose from the dead. Why is this, this strange unwillingness of some men, nay, in a sense of all men, to believe in God?

They are willing to believe other things. We have numbers of persons about who are like fish with their mouths open, ready for any bait. It does not matter how absurd may be the dream of a man, if he will persistently enough stand up in the street and publish his dream, or will print it, he will be certain to find a number of fools who will believe what he says.

In this country, although we think ourselves so very wise, Carlyle was not far off when he spoke of our population as consisting of so many millions, “mostly fools.” At any rate, there is a considerable sprinkling of them about. See how readily men believe what they read in the newspaper, though, probably, there is not a fragment of truth in it. That is all the better for the paper because the lie can be contradicted on the morrow, and that will make another column or two, and so fill up at a time when there is a dearth of news.

But there is great credulity among men in general. Do you think that anybody could sell patent medicines if everybody would be wise? No, but everybody is not wise. We are willing to believe what a man tells us if he will only tell it to us bravely enough, with a sufficient quantity of brass. But when it comes to believing God’s Word, many manifest a strange incapacity to believe. The box is shut and you cannot find the key. But bring a lie of man, and the box opens of its own accord. There is a sort of “Open sesame” then. Alas, often the falsehood of men is received and the truth of God is rejected!

Another thing is significant, that *men cling tenaciously to faith in themselves*. They do believe, they will believe, that they can work their way to heaven. You talk to them about their sin. Well, they cannot deny it, but they so extenuate it as to make it appear to be rather their misfortune than their fault. It is, with them, a calamity to be sinners, rather than a grave offense. So they make it out to be and in the future, those poor creatures are going to manage themselves!

The wine cup, it is true, has tempted them, and they have fallen many times—but now, they know better—they will never be affected by drink, again. The lust of the flesh which has led them captive to many a Delilah—oh, yes, they have “sown their wild oats”—but they will never go into that form of evil again—and so on, and so on.

The creature that has done nothing right, but everything that is wrong, still believes in himself. He goes to church and calls himself a “miserable sinner,” and yet continues to be a happy believer in his capacity to rule himself. “We have done the things we ought not to have done, and have left undone the things we ought to have done; and there is no health in us.”

Yes, we said that on our knees, but when we get on our legs again, we are going to do the things we ought to do, and to leave undone the things which should be left undone—and we feel as healthy—from the crown of our head to the sole of our feet, as if we never had a disease about us in our lives. Now, that is a strange thing, that man can believe in himself and yet cannot believe in God. This is the madness of our nature—that man thinks that he can do everything when he can do nothing.

Then, observe how, instead of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, *some prefer an emotional religion*. I am astounded at some people, how readily they are excited, how easily they are “saved”—at least, they say they are saved. Do they believe the promises and hang upon the Word of God? No, but they “feel” so much. These same feelings that seem to lift you up to heaven will thrust you down to the depths of Hades. Yet these people prefer mere natural emotions, an inward feeling, to this which is the infinitely sounder way—to believe in God and in Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

Next, *some stubbornly suffer under unbelief*. They have been pining for rest for years and they have not attained it yet. Still, they will not believe in Christ. Oh, what would they not give if they could but have a night’s calm rest and could by day go to business without distress of mind! Yet they will not give themselves up to Christ to be saved, simply trusting Him to save them. They have brought themselves

near to the door of suicide and wished they had never been born—yet they will not take the healing medicine that lies close by their hand. They will do anything sooner than trust in God.

I notice, too, *that such people demand this and that of God, beyond what He has revealed*. God has spoken, but that is not enough for them. God must do something else for them—they must dream some peculiar dream, they must see some strange vision—they must fancy that they hear a voice in the air. Pshaw! Put the whole of that nonsense away.

Believe what God has said and you are on sure ground. Come to this “more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.” Believe this and your peace shall be like a river and your righteousness as the waves of the sea. But no—they will not. God must do this or that to oblige them, or else they will not believe Him. You make Him a liar if He will not pamper your whims—but He will do nothing of the sort.

I might, with profit, dwell on that point, but time flies too rapidly for me to say more upon it.

III. Notice, in the third place, that FAITH IS NOT A THING TO BE DESPISED.

Have you never heard people say, “Oh, they preach up faith, you know”? “Well, what is faith?” “Well, it is just believing so and so.” Listen, sirs, and then speak like that no more. Faith is a most wonderful thing, for *it is a fair index of the heart*. If you will not believe in God, I see that in your heart you hate God. But if you will believe Him, you love Him.

We trust a man whom we love. I think that there is little trust in men towards whom we have no esteem and affection. If you believe God, your heart is right with Him. If you will not believe Him, do what you may, you are out of order with your God, I am sure of that. A child who does not believe his father’s word is not a loving and obedient child, we know

Faith in God is, next, *a sure proof of a change of mind*, for by nature, we do not think of God, much less do we trust Him—we trust what we can see, and hear, and taste, and feel. When we trust God, it shows that we have undergone a great change of mind, a singular change, of which there can be no surer evidence than that we see Him who is invisible and we live under the influence of His presence, and we really seek to please Him whom mortal eyes have never seen.

Does anyone think that faith is a little thing? Why, *it inaugurates purity of life*. The moment that a man believes in Christ Jesus, and trusts Him, he ceases from the sin he formerly loved. Sin becomes to him a burden and a plague. If you believe, your belief will kill your sinning, or else your sinning will kill your believing.

The greatest argument against the Bible is an unholy life—and when a man will give that up—he will convince himself. The Book will convince him when he has put out of the way that darling sin that now stands between him and God. A belief in God, as He reveals Himself in Christ, is the inauguration of a life of self-sacrifice and holiness.

Do any still talk of faith as being a little thing? Why, *it is faith that leads to prayer*, and prayer is the very breath of God in man, returning whence it came. If you believe, you will pray. How can you pray if you do not believe? Do you knock at a door of which you are persuaded that there is nobody there to hear you? You are not such a fool, I trust, but when you believe that there is a God, and that God is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, you will begin to seek Him—and you will never leave off seeking Him as long as you are in the land of the living.

Faith little? Why, *it is faith that glorifies God*. All the works that we can ever do, be they what they may, can never bring such glory to God as a single act of trust. I venture to say that the highest adoration is not that of cherubim and seraphim before the blazing throne, but that of a poor sinner conscious of guilt, who, nevertheless, believes in God as He reveals Himself in Christ, putting away sin by the great sacrifice.

If you can tonight believe, thou biggest sinner out of hell, that God can pardon you, you have done Him honor. And if you, poor, troubled Christian, in the very vortex of your grief, can still believe that God is faithful and that He will bear you through, you have glorified His blessed name more than angels can. This is practical music that consists not in sound, but in the inner sense of the heart. It is true

melody to God. Faith is not the trifle that some think it to be. This holy trust in God is the heart and soul of all true experiential godliness.

IV. So I have come to my last point, grieving that I have had to slur so much where I should have liked to speak at length—THOSE WHO REFUSE TO EXERCISE FAITH WILL MISS MANY GREAT PRIVILEGES. I might mention many, but the text gives us the one which I will dwell upon—”If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.”

It means, first, that those who believe not will miss *establishment in comfort*. If you believe not in God, your heart shall be moved like the trees of the woods by the wind. You shall be tossed to and fro like the waves that dash on the rocks. You shall be driven along like a rolling thing that is twisted about by the whirlwind.

But if you will believe in God, and in His dear Son who reveals Him, then you shall come to an anchorage and there you shall outride every storm. Fear shall depart and your soul shall be at rest. Oh, you do not know the profound calm that overspreads the spirit when it has done with itself and just commits itself to God! You never can know this, if you will not believe.

In the next place, if you will not believe, you shall never enjoy *establishment in judgment*. There are many persons who do not know what to believe—they heard one man the other day, and they thought that he spoke very cleverly and they agreed with him. They heard another the next day, who was rather more clever, and he went the other way, so they went with him.

Poor souls, driven to and fro, never knowing what is what! “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.” You shall be like the moon that is never two days alike. You shall seem to believe this and to believe that, and yet really believe nothing. But if you will come and trust your God—wholly believe every Word that He has spoken and especially believe the Incarnate Word, the ever-blessed Son of God, who gave Himself for the guilty—then you shall begin to know something.

You shall put things in their right places and knowing the truth, you shall know more of it and you shall get the assurance of faith from which you shall never be shaken, as the Holy Ghost shall bear witness to the truth within your soul.

Next, we want an *establishment in conduct*. Look at certain men who once professed to be converted. They were down at a revival meeting the other day and they went to the penitent form. And then, a day or two after, they went to quite another form. They made a confession of faith and joined the church.

Ah, me! the church will be well rid of them if their conduct is such as it has been lately. But why is it that their conduct is not always as it should be? How is it that many men are this and that and twenty things? How is it that there is inconsistent behavior? My text supplies the answer, “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.” But a genuine faith in God, a solid faith in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, a true realization of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, will keep you from stumbling and you shall be preserved faultless until the coming of your Lord.

So it is, also, with *establishment in hope*. We know some who are, at times, all bright of eye and cheerful with hope, and they look into the eternal world with great delight. They half wish that they could die at once and be where Jesus is. But after a very short time their castle in the air melts away—they have no joy, no hope, no peace.

No, “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.” If you hope without believing, your hope is an anchor that has not gripped anything. If you expect without a proper ground of expectation, or if the ground be not what God has said, then you may expect what you like, but as your expectation is not from Him, it will certainly be disappointed.

Oh, that you would make the Word of God the top and bottom of everything in your life! Oh, that you would take it as the Alpha and Omega of your knowledge of things divine! Then would you be established, for there would be something to ground your hope upon, which even Satan could not destroy.

And lastly, we want to be *established in spiritual vigor and strength*. You do not want to be always babes in Christ—you want to be fathers. You desire to be useful—you want to be bringing others to Christ. Perhaps you look at some with envy. You say, “Such and such a person is quite a mother in Israel. Such and such a man is a standard-bearer for Christ. But I am a poor, puny thing, of no use to the Lord.”

If you would grow, you must believe your God. He that gets close to God and leans wholly upon God, shall have divine strength imparted to him. We have never believed God, any one of us, as we ought to have believed Him. Some of us have believed Him, as we thought, without reserve at times. Have we not gone to Him? We will not tell the story now—but have we not gone to Him in abject need and cast ourselves upon Him—and found all supplies even exceeding abundantly above what we asked for or even thought? Then have we found that our God has been to us like the illimitable waters of the great sea, and we have cried to others, “Bring your great vessels and fill them from this ocean.”

I am told that in the olden times, on Christmas Day, it was the custom in country villages for the squire always to fill with good things whatever vessels the poor people brought up to the hall, that they might have a Christmas dinner. It was strange how big the basins grew year after year. Whenever the man came round with the crockery cart, every good housewife would look all over his stock to see if there was not a still larger basin. It was a rule that the squire’s servants should always fill the bowl, whatever size it was, and thus the bowls grew bigger and bigger.

Oh, my dear friends, God will fill your bowl however large it is! Get as big a bowl as you can—and when you bring it, if ever there comes a whisper in your ear, “Now you have presumed upon God’s benevolence, you have brought too big a bowl”—smile at yourself and say, “This is as nothing to His overflowing fullness.”

If I said, “O poor sea, poor sea, now you will be drained dry, for they bring such big bowls to be filled with your waters.” The sea, tossing its mighty billows far and wide, would laugh at my folly. Come, then, and bring your largest conceptions of God and multiply them ten thousand fold and believe in Him as this Book would make you believe in Him.

Open your mouth wide and He will fill it. He bids you even to command Him. He says, “Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.” That is a wonderful expression. Rise to the sublimity of faith and be daring with your God.

And you guilty ones, look up, believing that He is greater in mercy than you are in sin—and more able to forgive than you are to transgress—and you shall find it so. But “if ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.” Let us all go home, believing in Christ Jesus, for His dear name’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON

ISAIAH 7:1-16 AND 2 CHRONICLES 28:1-16

Isaiah 7:1-2. *And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, King of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it. And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.*

They were tossed to and fro, bent, thrown down, as the trees of a forest in a tornado. They had already felt the power of these two confederate kings and they were terribly afraid. David himself would have had confidence in God, but “the house of David” had gone far astray. Ahaz had cast off the fear of God and he had therefore great fear of men.

3. *Then said the LORD unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-Jashub thy son.*

Shear-Jashub was but a child and why Isaiah was to take his son with him does not appear, except that his name signifies, “The remnant shall return,” and it was part of the prophet’s message that the remnant, the people who had been carried away captive, should return.

3. *At the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller’s field;*

God knows the exact spot where His servants shall meet with the men to whom He sends them. There is a corner where the fuller’s field just juts upon the upper pool—there Isaiah will meet king Ahaz—and there he is to speak to him. Is there any spot by the “Elephant and Castle” where God means to meet with some soul tonight? I pray that it may be so.

4. *And say unto him,*

The prophet is told the word he is to speak as well as the place where he is to deliver the message. Isaiah knew that he was soon to go and deal with men of hard heart and deaf ear. The other day we read the sixth chapter of this prophecy and we noted the hard task that Isaiah had to perform. Now he is beginning his work with the man whom the Bible calls, “That King Ahaz,” as if it could not say anything bad enough of him, but had merely to mention his name and everybody would know who was meant.

4. *Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.*

Their kingdoms were dying out. They were like burnt-out firebrands—they made a little smoke—and within a very short time there would be nothing left of them. And Ahaz need not be afraid of them.

5-9. *Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son.*

God did not intend it to grow any bigger. These two little kingdoms of Syria and Ephraim were to keep as they were until they were destroyed.

9-12. *If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established. Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD.*

He put his refusal very prettily, as men often do when they want to say an evil thing. He refused to accept a sign from the Lord, under the idle pretense that it would be tempting God. We never tempt God when we do what He bids us. There is no presumption in obedience. It was an idle compliment, to conceal the impudence of his heart. The Lord invited him to acknowledge JEHOVAH as his God—“Ask thee a sign of JEHOVAH thy God.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, neither will I tempt JEHOVAH.” He did not say, “JEHOVAH, my God.” And his silence meant dissent.

13. *And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David;*

Observe, the prophet does not say, “Hear now, O Ahaz!” as if God would not deal with Ahaz on his own account, but only because he was of the “house of David.” The Lord remembered His covenant with David. God sometimes blesses men for the sake of their fathers. He might not hear a word that they had to say, but He remembers their fathers, and the amity and comity which there was between Himself and their fathers.

13-14. *Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God, also? Therefore the LORD himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,*

A most wonderful sign this!

14-15. *And shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.*

Whereupon a wise commentator says that before children are able to learn, their parents should look upon the very feeding of them as a means of making them to know the difference between good and evil.

16. *For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.*

This was the sign-manual. Judah could not be destroyed, for our Lord was to spring out of Judah—and this was the sign that Judah must stand, because Immanuel must be born of that nation—and the time for this great event was fixed by the Lord. Until a child is some few years of age, he does not distinguish between good and evil, but in a shorter time than it would take a child to come to years of responsibility, God meant to cut off both those kings—and He did.

This was a very wonderful prophecy and ought to have filled Ahaz with great delight, and with confidence in God, but it did nothing of the kind.

Now we are going to read more of the story of this King Ahaz.

2 Chronicles 28:1-3. *Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father: for he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.*

God had driven out the Canaanites because of these abominations, therefore for His own people to practice them was peculiarly provoking to Him.

4. *He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.*

He could not do enough of it—so many trees, so many altars. There are some men who use every opportunity for sin, with a diligence which would bring the blush into the face of Christians who are not as diligent in obeying as these men are in sinning.

5. *Wherefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hands of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter.*

It did not look as if the captives would ever return, yet the prophet's son was named Shear-Jashub, "The remnant shall return." Ahaz might have said to Isaiah, "Your child's name is a lie." We shall see.

6-11. *For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah that was next to the king. And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold, because the LORD God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the LORD your God? Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which ye have taken captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you.*

It was very wonderful that these wild fellows should listen to this prophet with all those captives round about them. It was a brave act on the part of the prophet Oded to go out and utter his protest.

12-15. *Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war, and said unto them, Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for*

whereas we have offended against the LORD already, ye intend to add more to our sins and to our trespass: for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the congregation. And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria.

What a wonderful thing that was! Ahaz ought to have said to Isaiah, “Your child’s name is right, after all, for the remnant has returned.” Did it not seem as if Ahaz must now trust God? But notice what the next verse says.

16. *At that time did King Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him.*

When men are determined to be unbelievers and disobedient, they will send anywhere for help but to the Lord. Israel and Syria were very little kingdoms, but Assyria was a great empire, the mighty nation of the period. Yet no help came to Ahaz from that quarter, for we read in the twentieth verse, “And Tilgath-Pilneser, king of Assyria, came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not.” The twenty-first verse tells us that Ahaz bribed the king of Assyria, “but he helped him not.” That is always the dirge at the end of all efforts to secure human instead of divine aid.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—531, 34, 196

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